DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 149 920 RC 010 347

AUTHOR Voth, Donald E.
TITLE Constituencies, Clients, and Agreement in Rural Development: A Preliminary Statement for Project S-120.
SPONS AGENCY Arkansas Agricultural Experiment Station, Fayetteville.
REPORT NO USDA-CSRS-S-120
PUB DATE 15 Nov 77
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southern Association of Agricultural Scientists (75th, Houson, Texas, February 5-8, 1978)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Agencies; *Agency Role; *Attitudes; Classification; Comparative Analysis; Criteria; *Delivery Systems; Models; Organizations (Groups); Policy Formation; Political Influences; *Power Structure; Public Opinion; Research Methodology; *Rural Development; Rural Population; *Theories

ABSTRACT

Objective B of the Regional Project Statement for Project S-120 is "to determine perceptions toward development in activities, agency representatives, and clientele affected by organizational and agency activities". This paper addresses Objective B and presents a perspective which "suggests an answer to the inevitable 'so what' question when agency and public's responses are compared". Consideration is given to the "bottom up" and the "top down" perspectives; wherein the primary flow of power, influence, information, resources, etc. is perceived as coming from the bottom or the top. A general frame of reference for classification of publics and for straightforward, practical treatment of comparisons of publics and agencies is presented; wherein, the constituency relates to the agency according to the bottom-up perspective and the clientele relates to the agency according to the top-down perspective. Agencies are classified as public or governmental and private and the nature of constituencies and clientele is distinguished in terms of "federated" and/or "grassroots" publics. Finally, consideration is given to methodological issues and questions (e.g., which components should be included in such a research study, who would serve as the least biased interviewees, and how valid is the business of treating comparisons comparatively). (JC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

FEB 1978
ERIC/CRESS
RECEIVED

ED149924

Constituencies, Clients, and Agreement in Rural Development:

A Preliminary Statement for Project S-120
(Draft)

Donald E. Voth
November 15, 1977

Introduction

This is an attempt to develop some of the concepts which are required to compare development agencies with their publics in their orientation toward development. It is designed to contribute to the achievement of one of the objectives of Southern Regional Research Project S-120, "Social Organization for Development of Low-Income Rural Counties."

This project involves, in addition to what is discussed here, the determination of significant development activities in selected low-income counties in the South, the identification of both leaders and organizations active in these development activities, an analysis of the groups or group structures implicit in inter-relationship among local leaders and explicit in the organizations which are identified, and the determination of the degree of success achieved by these groups or group structures.

The following discussion is directed specifically at the problem of organizations and their publics, how these publics can be classified and identified, and how perceptions of organizational officers and publics can be compared, and what can be inferred from such comparisons.

Paper presented at the 75th Annual Meeting of the Southern Association of Agricultural Scientists, Houston, Texas, 5-8 February 1978.

RC010347

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Donald E. Voth
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

Objectives of S-120

Objective B of the Regional Project Statement for project S-120 is "To determine perceptions toward development of: organizational officers, members involved in development activities, agency representatives, and clientele affected by organizational and agency activities." This discussion is concerned with the identification of the ". . clientele affected by. ." and with the analysis of the perceptions held by the clientele identified.

The project statement does not develop a specific theoretical frame of reference for comparing perceptions of clientele with, for example, agency representatives, etc. Some research has been done on this and closely related questions (Nix and Seerley, 1973; Nix et al., 1974; Meiller and Broom, 1976; and Osgood, et al., 1977) both in the community development and rural development traditions and in the somewhat more developed community power and decision-making literature and the community organization literature. Some of this research is simply descriptive, e. g. priorities of leaders are compared with those of the public and differences are presented (Osgood, et al., 1977). Some focuses upon the development of organizational taxonomies (Nix and Seerley, 1973). What is needed, however, is a relatively straight-forward perspective which suggests an answer to the inevitable "so what" question when agency and public's responses are compared.

Two Perspectives

Two perspectives with profound but nearly opposite practical implications can easily be imposed upon all of this research. These will be called, simply, the "top-down", and the "bottom-up" perspectives.

The Top-Down Perspective.--This perspective sees the primary flow of power, influence, information, resources, etc. as going from a center with appropriate authority, technical expertise, etc. to the periphery, or the public.

It includes at least two important research and action traditions well known in rural sociology and rural development; diffusion of innovations, and, to some extent, leadership. Leadership is, of course, very complex, and the literature on leadership is sensitive to the need for reciprocal flows of influence. Nevertheless, the basic connotation of the term "leadership" cannot be avoided. In the same way, the diffusion of innovations literature, and the communications literature to which it is related, include the important concept of "feedback." Again, however, basic connotations of the words used imply an essentially "top-down" perspective.

From the top-down perspective differences in attitudes, opinions, or knowledge between agencies and their representatives and the public are (1) to be expected since the center plays a leadership role and should be better informed and are (2) evidence of friction or inefficiencies in the communication process. The prescription is usually additional and more effective education of the public.

The Bottom-Up Perspective.--From this perspective the primary flow of power, influence, information, resources, etc. are seen to proceed from the periphery or the public up to the center of the "responsible" agency. This perspective includes important research traditions in citizen participation and involvement (May, 1971; Mogulof, 1970a; 1970b, Spiegel, 1973) in democratic theory (Dahl, 1956, 1970) and in the community decision-making

literature (Ricci, 1971). This could have been termed the "democratic" perspective and the other the "elitist" perspective, however, in some rather complex ways, thoroughly and skillfully discussed by Ricci (1971:205-215) these terms tend to confuse the issue addressed here. This perspective emphasizes popular sovereignty and tends to view the public's existing capabilities and perceptions as inviolate. The bottom-up perspective admits, of course, to reverse flows of influence. In fact, the community power and decision-making literature really has its top-down and bottom-up schools. Nevertheless, the underlying assumption of democratic theory and theory and research on community decision making is that in some, perhaps completely unspecified sense, final authority rests with the public and all organizations and agencies, both private and governmental, exist to represent and serve that public.

From the bottom-up perspective differences in attitudes, opinions, or knowledge between agencies and their representatives and the public are (1) suggestive of flaws in the operation of our pluralistic version of a democratic system,[1] (2) suggest the need for the development and improvement of the mechanisms of representation (See Pitkin, 1967; Verba and Nie, 1972; and Hansen, 1972).

What to do with Attitude Comparisons

Must we, then, select one or the other perspective and go with it, since the implications of the two are inconsistent? The good sociologist, when confronted with such a conceptual dilemma, can usually turn it into an empirical question. Perhaps the same can be done with this issue.

---

[1]It might appear that this question was not relevant for private organizations. After all, who is to say what relationship should exist between private organizations and their publics? However, classical pluralist theory, in which organizations play a key role assumes that private organizations are nominally "democratic", or at least serve crucial functions of providing access.

The solution may rest in beginning to deal more specifically with agency's publics and the different types of publics agencies have. Much has been written about this in the context of organizational theory and research dealing with "open systems" and "organizational environments" (Selznick, 1949; Rogers and Agarwala-Rogers, 1976). Mayer Zald distinguishes between two types of publics that most agencies have. One is the agency's constituency and the other is the agency's clientele. The constituency, according to Zald, is ". . the groups and individuals who control the organization and to whom the agency executive or executive core is most immediately responsible--the board of directors, key legislators, officeholders, major fund-raisers or grantors." (Zald, 1970:92) Zald was discussing social work agencies. For others the examples would be quite different. Chamber of Commerce, for example, would include members as constituents. The clientele, on the other hand, is the target population or public which the agency serves or wishes to influence. Clearly, in some instances these two publics are joint, in others partially disjoint, and in others, completely disjoint.

The significance of the classification for the interpretation of opinion and attitude differences is that each public naturally falls into one of the two perspectives above. Clearly, the constituency relates to the agency according to the "bottom-up" perspective, and the clientele relates to the agency according to the "top-down" perspective. Again, both relationships will involve feedback of various kinds, but the definition of publics is largely based upon the direction of the flow of influence. Because of this the two sets of comparisons can be interpreted differently, but quite unambiguously. Differences between constituency and agency are predominately to be dealt with in terms of failures in representation, differences between

the agency and the clientele are to be dealt with in terms of failures of agency communication and education of the public. It is only when the two publics are completely joint that our old problem confronts us again.[2]

We have, then, a very general frame of reference which allows for the classification of publics and for straightforward, practical treatment of comparisons of publics with agencies. Before we can proceed to the development of a methodology, however, a number of other elementary classifications need to be dealt with.

Types of Organizations in Relation to Publics

Agencies can also be divided into types. For our purposes it will be necessary, at least, to distinguish between public or governmental agencies on the one hand and private agencies on the other--because there are distinct differences in agency constituency relationships. It may also be necessary to distinguish intermediate types, but for the moment we will make only this one distinction.

---

[2]This perspective leads to interesting interpretations of recent events in citizen participation. Welfare rights organizations, for example, are attempting to turn a public defined as client into a public defined as both client and constituency--generating hostility among the general tax-paying constituency. The Citizen Participation experiments of the Ford Foundation "Gray Areas" projects, which led to the Citizen Participation requirements in OEO, explored the idea that the agency-client relationship could not be effective unless ghetto youths also related to the agencies on a constituency basis, taking responsibility for policy-making. However, the definition of publics are constitutional issues, and when this was adopted by OEO it raised some still largely unrecognized constitutional questions--can a governmental bureaucracy legitimately define its constituencies?

Another very important distinction has to do with the nature of the constituencies and/or clienteles. These can be either individuals ("Grass-roots" publics) or organizations ("federated" publics), or a combination of both. These categories, together with the distinction of the two types of publics, lead to the following typology of publics that will need to be considered:

	Public Agency		Private Agency	
	Constituency	Clientele	Constituency	Clientele
Federated				
Grass-Roots				

It seems likely that not all types will actually occur at the local level. I cannot think of an example of a federated constituency of a public agency at the local level.

Methodological Issues

If some version of this schema is satisfactory, we still have to resolve several troublesome methodological issues.

Which Cells to Include in our Research.--We could, or course, restrict ourselves to looking at either constituencies or clienteles, or to only grass-roots versions of either, etc. To try to include all types of publics which are identified by the respective agencies may result in as many as four separate mini-researches for each agency, if an agency has both federated and grass-roots constituencies and clienteles.

Who can Answer the Questions?—This involves both who can respond to our instrument for determining ". . perceptions toward development. ." and who can identify an agency's publics. The question arises in those cases where a spokesperson must be selected for an agency or organization, and not, of course, where people may speak for themselves, as in the case of interviewing grass-roots constituents or clients.

In determining the relevant publics for an agency, for example, we would conceivably interview a representative of the agency, define our two types of publics, try to confirm that these types really make sense in the context of the agency, and then ask the agency representative to (1) identify each public in general and (2) provide specific elements of each public which we could interview. What biases may enter into this process? Will not an agency representative select only those specific elements of the agency's publics which are known to be "closer" to the views held by that particular representative? How can this be avoided without turning the project into a major effort in its own right?

Can Comparisons be Treated Comparatively?—A peculiar difficulty will arise in comparing differences for different agencies, especially when some agencies have primarily grass-root publics and others have primarily federated publics. It is hard to see what could be made of hypothetical data on a hypothetical question, "Is development good?", as follows:

Agency A (Grass-Roots Constituency)	Agency B (Federated Constituency)
Agency representative says "yes", and 75 percent of a sample of 20 constituents said "yes."	Agency representative says "yes" and two out of three organizational constituent representatives said "yes."

This becomes especially troublesome when it is recognized that in the final analysis, federated constituencies involve only another layer of representation and that, at some point, the constituent agencies themselves have grass-roots constituents.

Dahl, Robert
1956 A Preface to Democratic Theory. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Illinois.

Dahl, Robert
1970 After the Revolution. Yale University Press, New Haven, Conn.

Hansen, Susan Blackall
1972 Concurrence in American Communities: The Response of Local Leaders to the Community Political Agenda. Stanford University Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Stanford, California.

Meiller, Larry R. and Glen M. Broom
1976 "Experiments in Community Consensus-Building: A Coorientational Analysis," paper presented at the meetings of the Association for Education in Journalism, College Park, Maryland, August 1 (Department of Agricultural Journalism, University of Wisconsin, Madison).

May, Judith V.
1971 Citizen Participation: A Review of the Literature. Institute of Governmental Affairs, University of California, Berkeley.

Mogulof, Melvin B.
1970a Citizen Participation: A Review and Commentary on Federal Policies and Practices. The Urban Institute, Washington, D. C.

Mogulof, Melvin B.
1970b Citizen Participation: The Local Perspective. The Urban Institute, Washington, D. C.

Nix, Harold L. and Norma R. Seerley
1973 "Comparative Views and Actions of Community Leaders and Non-Leaders," Rural Sociology, Vol. 38, pp. 427-438.

Nix, Harold L., et al.
1974 "Views of Leader Respondents Compared with Random Respondents Views," Journal of the Community Development Society, Vol. 5, pp. 89-91.

Osgood, Mary H., et al.
1977 "Citizens and Official's Perceptions of Local Problems: Are they the Same?," Pennsylvania State University, Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology, Staff Paper Series.

Pitkin, Hannah
1967 The Concept of Representation. University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles.

Ricci, David
1971 Community Power and Democratic Theory: The Logic of Political Analysis. Random House, New York.

Rogers, Everett M. and Rekha Agarwala-Rogers
1976 Communication in Organizations. The Free Press, New York.

Selznick, Philip
1949 TVA and the Grass Roots: A Study in the Sociology of Formal Organizations. University of California Press, Berkeley.

Spiegel, Hans B. C.
1973 "Citizen Participation in Federal Programs: A Review," in Roland S. Warren (ed.), Perspectives on the American Community. Rand McNally, Chicago, pp. 365-389.

Verba, Sidney and Norman Nie
1972 Participation in America: Political Democracy and Social Equality. Harper & Row, New York.

Zald, Mayer N.
1970 "Organizations as Polities: An Analysis of Community Organization Agencies," in Fred M. Cox, et al. (eds.), Strategies in Community Organization: A Book of Readings. F. E. Peacock, Itasca, Illinois.